

Message Text

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E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: TGEN, SA

SUBJECT: PROPOSED SAUDI ARABIAN CENTER FOR SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY (SA
NCST)-JEC PROJECT AGREEMENT

REF STATE 18104

1. EMBASSY HAS REVIEWED MATERIAL MENTIONED PARAGRAPH ONE
REFTEL AND SHARES NEA/ARP CONCERN OVER SCOPE OF ACTIVITY
ENVISIONED. OUTLINED BELOW ARE EMBASSY'S RESPONSES TO
QUESTIONS RAISED REFTEL, PLUS ITS THOUGHTS AND RESERVA-
TIONS CONCERNING PROPOSED SANCST JECOR PROJECT AGREEMENT.

2. EMBASSY'S PRIME CONCERN IS THAT THE INSTITUTION UNDER
WHICH THIS PROJECT WOULD OPERATE HAS NOT REPEAT NOT BEEN
CREATED. TO OUR KNOWLEDGE, MINISTRY OF FINANCE IS THE
ONLY SAUDI GOVERNMENTAL INSTITUTION ACTIVELY PUSHING FOR
CREATION OF SANCST, ALTHOUGH INDIVIDUALS FROM OTHER IN-
STITUTIONS (E.G. RIDA OBEID) ARE PRESSING. EMBASSY HAS
ALSO DETECTED OPPOSITION TO SANCST IN MINISTRIES OF EDUCATION
AND PLANNING AND IN UNIVERSITIES. THIS DOES NOT, REPEAT
NOT, MEAN EMBASSY OPPOSES CREATION OF SANCST. HOWEVER,
IN PAST WHEN SHINN AND EGGER GOUPS RAISED QUESTION OF
AUTHORITY FOR SANCST, THEY WERE NOT ABLE TO ASCERTAIN
EXTENT OF SAG SUPPORT FOR SUCH AN INSTITUTION, AND WERE
SIMPLY TOLD BY MINISTER OF FINANCE THAT "THERE IS NO
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PROBLEM." (SIC) MINFIN AND RIDA OBEID ALSO BELIEVE THAT

SIGNING OF AGREEMENT WILL IN ITSELF LEAD TO CREATION OF SANCST, I.E., WILL PUSH THE SAG TO FINAL APPROVAL.

3. EMBASSY SHARES NEA/ARP CONCERN OVER NON-AVAILABILITY OF PROFESSIONAL MANPOWER. AVAILABLE PROFESSIONALS ARE SO SCARCE THAT CREATION OF SANCST WOULD INEVITABLY RESULT IN DIVERTING SCARCE RESOURCES FROM OTHER IMPORTANT PROJECTS. WE BELIEVE THAT BEFORE GOING FURTHER WITH THE PROJECT, THIS PROBLEM SHOULD BE RAISED WITH THE SAG. FINAL DECISION CONCERNING ALLOCATION OF SCARCE RESOURCES SHOULD BE LEFT TO SAG. OUR INVOLVEMENT SHOULD BE LIMITED TO POINTING OUT ALTERNATIVES, AND CONTINGENT UPON SATISFACTORY SAUDI COMMITMENT TO PROVIDE NECESSARY MANPOWER.

4. IT IS TRUE THAT NONE OF THE PROJECTS PROPOSED IN DRAFT AGREEMENT REQUIRES THE CREATION OF SANCST, HOWEVER, ANY ATTEMPT BY THE USG OR NSF TO BACK AWAY FROM OUR PREVIOUSLY EXPRESSED SUPPORT FOR THE ESTABLISHMENT OF SANCST WOULD CAUSE MORE PROBLEMS THAN WOULD OUR DECISION TO PRESS AHEAD. EMBASSY FEELS THAT THE SUGGESTION CONTAINED PARAGRAPH THREE(3) REFTTEL TO FOCUS ON SMALL, MANAGEABLE PROJECTS, CARRIED OUT BY AMERICAN PERSONNEL, IS THE BEST CHOICE. WE ENDORSE SUGGESTIONS THIS PARAGRAPH WITH THE PROVISIO THAT "TASK I," THE SCIENTIFIC AND RESOURCES INVENTORY AND ANALYSIS, SHOULD BE GIVEN PRECEDENCE OVER OTHER JOBS. IMPLEMENTATION OF THIS PROJECT WOULD ALLOW SAG TO OBTAIN INDICATION OF TRUE MANPOWER RESOURCES AVAILABLE FOR DEVELOPMENT OF SANCST.

5. EMBASSY SUGGESTS THAT THE USG/NSF/USREP PUSH FOR IMPLEMENTATION OF "TASK I" OF PROJECT OUTLINE, INDEPENDENT OF EXISTENCE OF SANCST, EMBASSY ALSO ENDORSES DEPARTMENT SUGGESTION THAT AGREEMENT SHOULD BE RE-CAST ALONG LINES SET FORTH BY DR. SHINN, I.E., NSF SHOULD PLACE A TEAM OF SCIENTIFIC/EDUCATIONAL CONSULTANTS IN SAUDI ARABIA TO CARRY OUT PROJECTS WHICH CAN MAKE REAL CONTRIBUTION TO KINGDOM'S S&T NEEDS, AND BE POINTED TO AS TANGIBLE PROOF OF U.S. ABILITY TO EFFECTIVELY ASSIST DEVELOPMENT PLANS.

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COMMENT: SANCST SHOULD IDEALLY BE UNDER THE AUSPICES OF THE MINISTRY OF FINANCE SINCE NO, REPEAT NO, OTHER BODY IS LIKELY TO BE SUFFICIENTLY NEUTRAL TO ALLOW SANCST TO EVOLVE INTO AN AUTONOMOUS S&T CENTER FOR THE KINGDOM. THEREFORE, WHILE WE SHOULD MINIMIZE OUR ENTANGLEMENT IN INTER-MINISTERIAL BICKERING, EMBASSY FEELS THAT IF CALLED UPON TO EXPRESS AN OPINION WE MUST THROW OUR SUPPORT TO

MINFIN.
PORTER

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